

Opinion

Free Press Viewpoint



Are jobs justified?

Need a job? Ask any level of government in the state of Kansas for one. They seem to be the only people hiring.

According to a report released by the state Department of Labor, Kansas government agencies have 6,000 more employees in November than they did in November 2005. That's about the entire population of Colby.

That's not good in so many ways.

For starters, it gives the state a bad reputation. According to the Kansas chapter of the Americans for Prosperity, Kansas was 49th of the 50 states in private-sector job growth during that time.

Kansas residents will also wonder where their tax dollars are going. Sure, those tax dollars are used to maintain the day-to-day operations for the state, but not every section of the state sees growth in a such a way to justify hiring more government-related employees.

Will Kansas taxes go up to pay those new employees? Western Kansas residents should get mad if they do. With a population loss, why should western Kansas pay more taxes for more government employees when western Kansas has a continuous population decline?

Logically, fewer people equates to fewer government employees, which should mean lower taxes. But government and logic don't always go together.

Having more government employees is not good politically. The Democrats are still smiling about their edge they have in Congress now. And, of course, the Democrat state governors are riding that bandwagon as well. Throughout this decade, the Democrats have pushed and shoved their ways into the headlines and radio microphones saying there is too much government and it needs to become more efficient.

Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius is one of those Democrats. She still says Kansas is in a better financial position now than years ago.

Now is the Democrats' chance to put their money where their mouth is, or will they be too busy posturing themselves for November 2008?

Republican state Rep. Jim Morrison is aware of the government job growth. He expects that issue to be discussed and reviewed during the 2007 legislative session — but don't expect a solution soon.

— *John Van Nostrand is publisher of the Colby Free Press*

Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan., 67701. Or e-mail jvannostrand@nwkansas.com or pdecker@nwkansas.com. Opinions do not necessarily reflect the *Free Press*.

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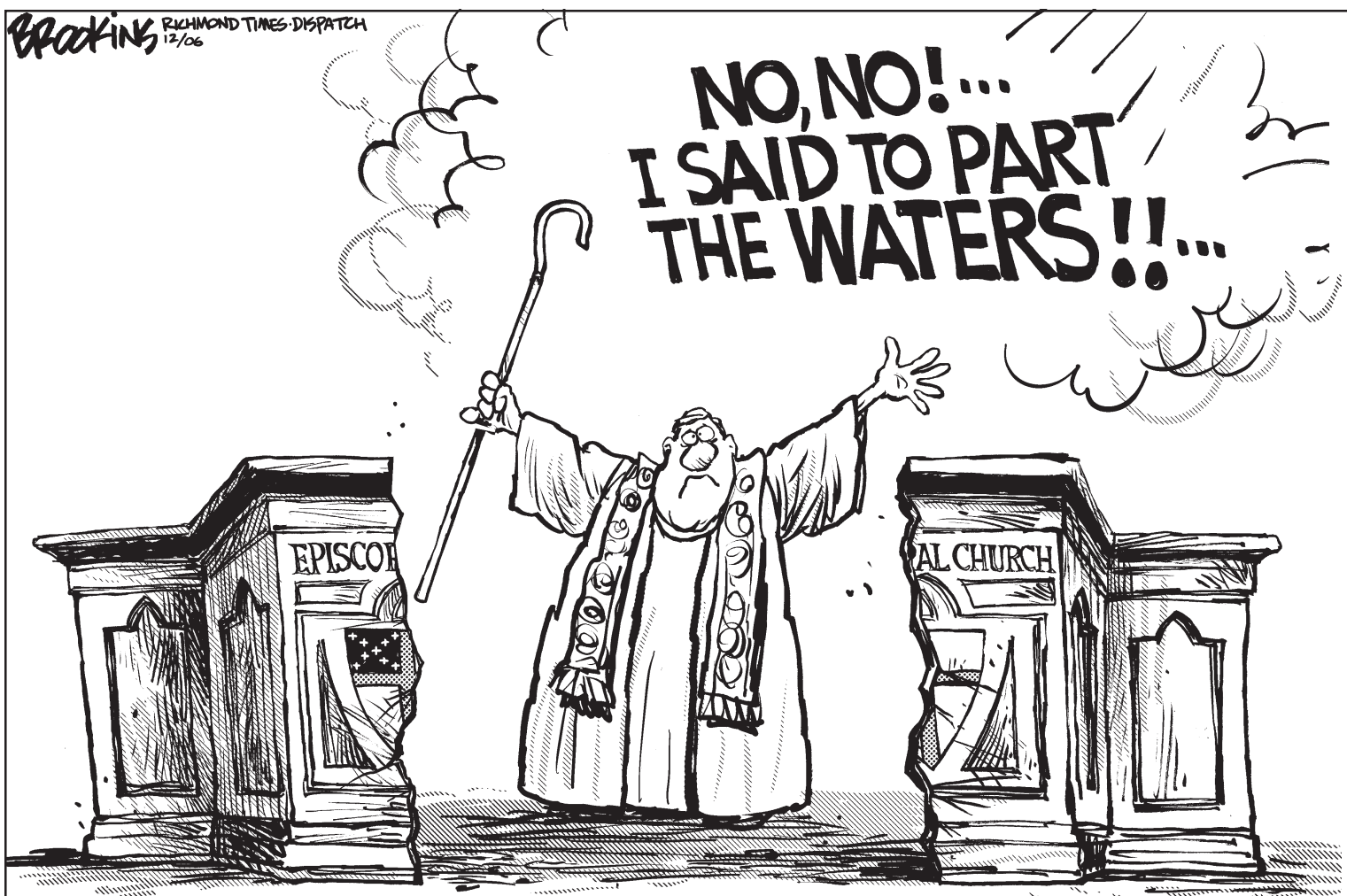
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An honorable man

It is likely that, after the expected pomp of the funeral ceremony, the people of America will go about their business, giving little thought to Gerald Ford, the 38th president of our country.

His was an unusual presidency in many ways. First, of course would be that he was the only man to serve as both vice president and president without being elected to either position.

He was appointed to take Spiro Agnew's place after Agnew pleaded no contest to tax evasion charges and resigned. He then became president after Richard Nixon resigned during the Watergate scandal.

His term was also unusual in its brevity — Aug. 9, 1974, to Jan. 20, 1976. One other unusual part of his legacy is that apparently Ronald Reagan asked him to be his running mate in 1980 and chose George H.W. Bush after Ford turned him down.

Ford was not a great man in the usual sense. I am reminded of his quip that he was "a Ford, not a Lincoln." Great men are too often divisive. When we think of our greatest leaders, we think of times of great peril and great victory for the nation.

We do not often think of the differences men of great ambition and drive bring out in all of us. That is not to say all the division great men have brought has been bad, either.

Lincoln gave us the Civil War and destroyed slavery. No great president, with the possible exception of Washington, was without enemies



Jay Kelley
 • Speaking MyMind

who were both critical of his methods and suspicious of his designs.

Ford was not an everyman, either. He was not just an average man of average means and intelligence and, contrary to what has been remembered about his clumsier moments, he was definitely no bumbler.

He was not afflicted by any sort of naive inability to see evil as it was, but he was also not quick to accuse. One of the last to give up on Nixon, his pardon was not a political deal, as some at the time claimed.

It was simply his best idea for healing the wounds created by the "national nightmare" as he called Watergate and the ensuing scandal.

Neither did he lack ambition. Interestingly, Ford gave up his real desire for the presidency. He wanted to be Speaker of the House and was minority leader when he was tapped for the vice presidency.

No, Gerald Ford was not a great man, nor was he a foolish bumbler. He was not an "amiable

political dupe." He was that rarest man of all. An honorable man placed in circumstances beyond his control who just did what he thought was right.

Some insight on his pardon of Nixon may be gleaned perhaps from his reaction to the Clinton impeachment. He wrote a letter to the New York Times stating Clinton should not be impeached, but should "be forced to stand before the House and listen to the representatives denounce him."

He understood the need to do right and to be above board, but he also understood the need to forgive and to heal.

He inherited a presidency beset with problems and scandal, both on the foreign and domestic fronts. Vietnam was winding down and the American people wanted nothing more than out, yet he risked more lives to rescue more than 200,000 pro-American refugees who would have been slaughtered had they left.

He sent the Marines to recapture the Mayaguez from the Cambodian government, again a potentially disastrous move politically, but the right thing to do.

Perhaps his greatest feat was after he was out of office. After nearly 32 years of public service, including one war, he simply went home.

That's what honorable men do.

Jay Kelley is a local writer who speaks his mind from time to time. His e-mail is jkelly@st-tel.net.

Opening the door to Cuba

By Rep. Jerry Moran

I traveled with nine other Members of Congress to meet with officials in Cuba. The trip comes at a unique time as the health of Cuban leader Fidel Castro continues to be in question. Under Castro's dictatorship, this country has remained a communist state for 47 years. During this time, our foreign policy has centered on unilateral sanctions and isolating Cuba.

I have long fought for the ability of farmers and ranchers to be able to sell their products to Cuba. In 2000, I successfully helped open the door to agriculture trade with Cuba. The passage of H.R. 4461 allowed for the export of agriculture products to Cuba for the first time in 38 years. From December 2001 to April 2006, this market opening led to Cuba purchasing nearly \$1.25 billion of U.S. food and farm commodities. However, due to greater restrictions by the U.S. government in recent years, the export of U.S. commodities has once again decreased.

While in Cuba, I met with high-ranking government, trade and religious leaders, including a visit with the Catholic Cardinal of Cuba concerning the lives of Cubans. My visit helped me gain a better understanding of the political situation in Cuba. It also opens the door to explore further opportunities to export U.S. agriculture commodities and pursue policies that improve

the lives of the Cuban people. My ultimate hope is that these meetings help establish a framework for our countries' relations during this time of transition.

Veterans

Last week, Congress approved the Veterans Benefits, Health Care and Information Technology Act, which included provisions of a bill I introduced to give veterans access to a full range of qualified mental health providers, including Licensed Professional Counselors and Marriage and Family Therapists. Previously, only privately insured individuals and active duty personnel - not veterans - had access to this care. Wh the growing number of veterans seeking mental health services after returning from combat overseas, I am pleased that Congress acted to recognize these practitioners to help veterans access the right care.

The benefits bill also authorizes additional funding for more blind rehabilitation specialists, strengthens support for homeless veterans and increases reimbursements for seriously disabled veterans living in state veterans homes. For rural veterans, the legislation creates a VA Office of Rural Health and allows veterans to access long term care closer to home by making non-VA facilities, such as community hospitals, eligible for state veterans home payments.

Also this week, I helped lead more than 60 Members of Congress in asking the President to address the increasing backlog of pending veterans' claims in his upcoming federal budget proposal. Since last year the number of pending compensation and pension claims has increased 17 percent. The letter encourages the Administration to provide funding for the staff and resources needed to overcome the backlog and delays. The hardship experienced by many veterans and their families waiting to have their claim processed is unacceptable. They deserve timely, accurate and consistent decisions from the VA.

In the Office

Miranda McCloud of Lyons was in Washington, D.C., this week participating in the Congressional Youth Leadership Council's educational program. Harry Watts of Manhattan and Terry Holdren of Topeka were in with Kansas Farm Bureau to visit about the upcoming farm bill. Patrick Doran, Eric Haar and Laura Maag Lutz were in with FHLBank of Topeka to visit about their projects in the First District. FHLBank Topeka provides funding to financial institutions in Kansas, Colorado, Nebraska and Oklahoma to help lenders make housing, economic development and small business loans.

About those letters . . .

The *Free Press* encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, if at all possible, and should include a telephone number and an address. Most importantly, all letters must include a signature. Unsigned letters cannot be published. We reserve the right to edit for clarity and length, and, likewise, reserve the right to reject letters deemed to be of no public interest or considered offensive or libelous.

Mallard Fillmore
 • Bruce Tinsley

